



# *A Calendar of Wisdom*



DAILY THOUGHTS TO NOURISH THE SOUL  
WRITTEN AND SELECTED FROM THE  
WORLD'S SACRED TEXTS BY

LEO TOLSTOY

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY  
PETER SEKIRIN

SCRIBNER

*This translation is dedicated to*

MELISSA TEMERTY



SCRIBNER

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—PETER SEKIRIN, Toronto 1996

# TOLSTOY AND THE CREATION OF *A Calendar of Wisdom*



PETER SEKIRIN

This was Leo Tolstoy's last major work. With it, he fulfilled a dream he had nourished for almost fifteen years, that of "collecting the wisdom of the centuries in one book" meant for a general audience. Tolstoy put a huge amount of effort into its creation, preparing three revised editions between 1904 and 1910. It was his own favorite everyday reading, a book he would turn to regularly for the rest of his life.

The original idea for this work appeared to come to Tolstoy in the mid-1880s. His first recorded expression of the concept of *A Calendar of Wisdom*—"A wise thought for every day of the year, from the greatest philosophers of all times and all people"—came in 1884. He wrote in his diary on March 15 of that year: "I have to create a circle of reading for myself: Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Lao-Tzu, Buddha, Pascal, The New Testament. This is also necessary for all people." In 1885, he wrote in a letter to his assistant, Mr. Chertkov: "I know that it gives one great inner force, calmness, and happiness to communicate with such great thinkers as Socrates, Epictetus, Arnold, Parker. . . . They tell us about what is most impor-

tant for humanity, about the meaning of life and about virtue. . . . I would like to create a book . . . in which I could tell a person about his life, and about the Good Way of Life.”

The process of collecting these thoughts took over fifteen years. Tolstoy began writing between December 1902 and January 1903. Then in his late seventies, he had fallen seriously ill; while meditating about the meaning of life and death, he was inspired to begin compiling what he then called *A Wise Thought for Every Day*. When he finally sent the book to his publisher, Tolstoy wrote in his diary: “I felt that I have been elevated to great spiritual and moral heights by communication with the best and wisest people whose books I read and whose thoughts I selected for my *Circle of Reading*.” He would often return in his diary to meditate upon this book, repeating variants of “What can be more precious than to communicate every day with the wisest men of the world?” Tolstoy carefully selected the contributors to this volume, “among the very best writers,” as he repeated to his colleagues and friends. They represented a wide variety of philosophical views, cultural backgrounds, and historical periods: “It will be a big surprise to the readers,” Tolstoy wrote, “that together with Kant and other famous thinkers, they will find in my book thoughts by Lucy Malory, an unknown journalist from the United States, from Oregon.” The first edition appeared in 1904 under the title *Thoughts of Wise Men*. It saw three editions during Tolstoy’s lifetime, between 1904 and 1910, each published with a different subtitle: *The Way of Life*, *Circle of Reading*, and *A Wise Thought for Every Day*.

Between 1904 and 1907, Tolstoy worked on the enlarged and completely revised second edition, from which this, its first English translation, is drawn. In mid-August 1905 he wrote the introduction that follows and noted in his diary: “I have revised and enlarged my *Calendar*, now it is twice as big. For two months I did not read

anything else, neither newspapers nor magazines, and I felt so good. . . . I became more and more astonished by the ignorance, and especially by the cultural, moral ignorance of our society. . . . All our education should be directed to the accumulation of the cultural heritage of our ancestors, the best thinkers of the world.”

The major difference between the first edition (*Thoughts of Wise Men*) and the second (*A Calendar of Wisdom*) was that Tolstoy now grouped the thoughts according to topics for a certain day, week, and month. He wrote on June 3, 1904, in his diary: “I am busy with the *Circle of Reading*. . . . I cannot do anything else. . . . I have selected thoughts and grouped them into the following major topics: God, Intellect, Law, Love, Divine Nature of Mankind, Faith, Temptations, Word, Self-Sacrifice, Eternity, Good, Kindness, Unification of People (with God), Prayer, Freedom, Perfection, Work, etc.” Tolstoy added about eight hundred of his own thoughts, written during his many years of meditation, or taken from previous diary entries. He generally started each day with an opening thought of his own, added quotes by other sources, and finished each day with a closing thought of his own.

Additionally, he wrote a short story, or vignette, three to ten pages in length for the end of every week. Each story corresponded to that week’s moral, philosophical, or religious topic; he prepared fifty-two stories in all and called them *The Sunday Reading Stories*. The majority of these fifty-two stories were written by Tolstoy especially for this work; the rest were selected and adapted from writings by Plato, Buddha, Dostoevski, Pascal, Leskov, Chekhov, and others. Tolstoy’s prose style in these *Sunday Reading Stories* is very different from the sophistication of his earlier novels. These stories, which were later greatly admired by Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, were written in a clear, simple, almost primitive language,

designed, as they were, for a wide and general audience. In them, Tolstoy combined simplicity of form and philosophical depth. Because these stories did not appear in all editions, and because they are as a whole quite long, they do not appear in this edition.

On December 21, 1904, after reading the galley proofs of the second edition called *The Calendar: The Circle of Reading for Every Day*, Tolstoy wrote in his diary: “During this last day I have descended from the spiritual and moral heights where I was all this time when I communicated with the best and wisest thinkers of the world when I created my *Circle of Reading*.” This title was changed in the second revised edition, published in 1905–1907, to *Wise Thoughts by Many Writers on Truth, Life, and Behavior Collected and Arranged for Every Day of the Year by Leo Tolstoy*. From its first publication, the book was always present on Tolstoy’s desk; it became his favorite book during the last five years of his life. Every day, from 1905 to 1910, he read thoughts presented in the book for the corresponding day of the year, and he recommended the same habit to all his friends. On May 16, 1908, he wrote to a man named Gusev: “I cannot understand how some people can live without communicating with the wisest people who ever lived on Earth? . . . I feel very happy every day, because I read this book.”

Tolstoy prepared a third revised, shortened, and simplified edition which appeared in print under the new title *The Way of Life* in 1910, the last year of his life. He wished to make the book easily comprehensible for even the simplest and least educated people—peasants and children. Most probably, Tolstoy compared *A Calendar of Wisdom* to *War and Peace* when he wrote that “To create a book for the masses, for millions of people . . . is incomparably more important and fruitful than to compose a novel of the kind which diverts some members of the wealthy classes for a short time, and then is forever forgotten. The region of



this art of the simplest, most widely accessible feeling is enormous, and it is as yet almost untouched.” Other editions appeared in Odessa and St. Petersburg in 1911–1912. A German critical edition (translated by E. Schmidt and A. Schkarvan, Dresden: Karl Reissner, 1907) included the sources of his numerous quotes.

An edition of *A Calendar of Wisdom* was published in Russia in 1912, but after the Russian Revolution publication was forbidden under the Soviet regime, because of the book’s spiritual orientation and its numerous religious quotes. When it was again published in Russia, in 1995, after the recent democratic reforms, it enjoyed tremendous success, selling over 300,000 copies.

It has never before been translated into English. The first English translation of *A Calendar of Wisdom* will be a real discovery for the English-speaking reader. Created by one of the world’s greatest novelists and thinkers to represent the very best of the world’s spiritual heritage, it draws on the greatest works of religion, philosophy, and literature the world has yet seen. It belongs among the very best creations of human genius, a work which will serve its readers as a practical spiritual guide on how to live in peace with oneself and how to live a life filled with kindness, satisfaction, and happiness. Tolstoy’s original goal was the delivery of wisdom to the widest possible number of people, “to entertain millions of readers.” This aim remains as compelling now, in this time of increasing spiritual need, as it was then.

# INTRODUCTION



BY LEO TOLSTOY

I took the thoughts collected here from a very large number of works and collections. I indicated the author of each thought beneath it, though I did not mark the exact source or book title or work from which I took it. In some cases, I translated these thoughts not directly from their original sources, but from a translation from the languages in which they became known to me, so sometimes my translations might not be completely identical to the originals. When I translated thoughts by German, French, or Italian thinkers, I did not strictly follow the original, usually making it shorter and easier to understand, and omitting some words. Readers might tell me that a quote is not then Pascal or Rousseau, but my own work, but I think that there is nothing wrong in conveying their thoughts in a modified form. Therefore, if someone desires to translate this book into other languages, I would like to advise them not to look for the original quotes from the English poet Coleridge, say, or the German philosopher Kant, or the French writer Rousseau, but to translate directly from my writing. Another reason some of these thoughts may not correspond to the originals is at times I took a thought from a lengthy and convoluted argument, and I had to change some words and phrases for

clarity and unity of expression. In some cases I even express the thought entirely in my own words. I did this because the purpose of my book is not to give exact, word-for-word translations of thoughts created by other authors, but to use the great and fruitful intellectual heritage created by different writers to present for a wide reading audience an easily accessible, everyday circle of reading which will arouse their best thoughts and feelings.

I hope that the readers of this book may experience the same benevolent and elevating feeling which I have experienced when I was working on its creation, and which I experience again and again, when I reread it every day, working on the enlargement and improvement of the previous edition.

—LEO TOLSTOY, March 1908

Note to Reader: In all of the book's original Russian-language editions, Tolstoy highlighted on each page the one quote that most succinctly expressed the day's theme. These quotes have been italicized in this edition.

—PETER SEKIRIN

# January 1

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Better to know a few things which are good and necessary than many things which are useless and mediocre.

What a great treasure can be hidden in a small, selected library! A company of the wisest and the most deserving people from all the civilized countries of the world, for thousands of years, can make the results of their studies and their wisdom available to us. The thought which they might not even reveal to their best friends is written here in clear words for us, people from another century. Yes, we should be grateful for the best books, for the best spiritual achievements in our lives.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

There are too many mediocre books which exist just to entertain your mind. Therefore, read only those books which are accepted without doubt as good.

—LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA

Read the best books first, otherwise you'll find you do not have time.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

*The difference between real material poison and intellectual poison is that most material poison is disgusting to the taste, but intellectual poison, which takes the form of cheap newspapers or bad books, can unfortunately sometimes be attractive.*

## January 2

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One of the worst prejudices known is held by the majority of the so-called scholars of our time, who claim that a person can live without faith.

Throughout the centuries, in every age, people have wanted to know or at least have a vague idea about the source, the beginning, and the final purpose of their existence. Religion satisfies this requirement, and makes clear those connections which unite all people as brothers, revealing to them that they have the same source of origin, the same task for their lives, and the same general final goal.

—GIUSEPPE MAZZINI

The essential meaning of every religion is to answer the question “Why do I live, and what is my attitude to the limitless world which surrounds me?” There is not a single religion, from the most sophisticated to the most primitive, which does not have as its basis the definition of this attitude of a person to the world.

At the heart of all religions lies a single unifying truth. Let Persians bear their taovids, Jews wear their caps, Christians bear their cross, Muslims bear their sickle moon, but we have to remember that these are all only outer signs. The general essence of all religions is love to your neighbor, and that this is requested by Manuf, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Socrates, Jesus, Saint Paul, and Mohammed alike.

—EWALD FLÜGEL

*The life of a person without faith is the life of an animal.*

## January 3

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Those who know the rules of true wisdom are baser than those who love them. Those who love them are baser than those who follow them.

—CHINESE PROVERB

The most important question to keep before ourselves at all times is this: Do we do the right thing? During this short period of time which we call our life, do our acts conform to the will of the force that sent us into the world? Do we do the right thing?

*When I am in difficult circumstances, I ask God to help me. But it is my duty to serve the Lord, and not His to serve me. As soon as I remember this, my burden becomes lighter.*

We have to fulfill honestly and irreproachably the work destined for us. It does not matter whether we hope that we will become angels some day, or believe that we have originated from slugs.

—JOHN RUSKIN

Just imagine that the purpose of your life is your happiness only—then life becomes a cruel and senseless thing. You have to embrace what the wisdom of humanity, your intellect, and your heart tell you: that the meaning of life is to serve the force that sent you into the world. Then life becomes a constant joy.

## January 4

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Even if we don't want to, we can't help but feel our connection to the rest of mankind: we are connected by industry, by trade, by art, by knowledge, and most importantly, by our common mortality.

*Kind people help each other even without noticing that they are doing so, and evil people act against each other on purpose.*

—CHINESE PROVERB

Every person has his burden. One cannot live without the support of other people; therefore we have to support each other with consolation, advice, and mutual warnings.

—FROM THE BOOK OF DIVINE THOUGHTS

All the children of Adam are members of the same body. When one member suffers, all the others suffer as well. If you are indifferent to the sufferings of others, you do not deserve to be called a man.

—MUSLIH-UD-DIN SAADI

The history of mankind is the movement of humanity toward greater and greater unification.

## January 5

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Sometimes, the damage done by our words is obvious and sometimes it isn't, but the damage is not any smaller for our not being able to see those people who suffer from our words.

A gunshot wound may be cured, but the wound made by a tongue never heals.

—PERSIAN WISDOM

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. . . . Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

—JAMES 3:2, 5

When you hear people speak about the viciousness of other people, do not share in pleasure by discussing these issues. When you hear about the bad deeds of people, do not listen to the end and try to forget what you have heard. When you hear about the virtues of other people, remember them and tell them to others.

—EASTERN WISDOM

Do listen to disputes, but be not so involved in disputes yourself.

—NIKOLAI GOGOL

I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.

—PSALMS 39:1

*Be afraid to destroy the unity of people by stirring bad feelings amongst them against another with your words.*



## January 6

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It's important to strive to do good, and even more important to strive to abstain from evil.

Abstention should be a habit in your life; it should support you in your virtues. For he who is resolute in goodness, there is nothing that he could not overcome.

—LAO-TZU

Put at least half of your energy into making yourself free of empty wishes, and very soon you will see that in so doing you will receive much greater fulfillment and happiness.

—After EPICETUS

God tests everyone, one with wealth, another with poverty. A rich man is tested in whether he would extend an arm of support to those who need it; a poor man in whether he would bear all his sufferings without discontent and with obedience.

—The TALMUD

I will call the right groom he who can stop his rage, which goes as fast as the fastest chariot. Other people have no power; they just hold the reins.

—DHAMMAPADA, a book of BUDDHIST WISDOM

*No matter how many times you aim to achieve victory over your passions, do not give up. Every effort weakens the power of passion and makes it easier to gain victory over it.*

## January 7

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Kindness is necessary in relationships with people. If you are not kind to a person, you are not fulfilling your major obligation.

You have to respect every person, no matter how miserable or ridiculous he or she may be. You should remember that in every person lives the same spirit which lives in us.

—After ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

*Do not be cruel of heart to those who are tempted, but try to console them, just as you would like to be comforted.*

—From the BOOK OF DIVINE THOUGHTS

(1) Do not postpone for tomorrow what you can do today. (2) Do not force another person to do what you can do by yourself. (3) Pride costs more than all that is necessary for food, drink, shelter, or dress. (4) We suffer so much, thinking about what could have happened, but not about what has actually happened. (5) If you lose your temper, count up to ten before you do or say anything. If you haven't calmed down, then count to a hundred; and if you have not calmed down after this, count up to a thousand.

—After THOMAS JEFFERSON

The kinder and the more thoughtful a person is, the more kindness he can find in other people.

Kindness enriches our life; with kindness mysterious things become clear, difficult things become easy, and dull things become cheerful.

## January 8

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Christian teaching is so simple that even small children can understand its meaning. Those people cannot understand it, and only those, who want to seem and to be called Christians without being real Christians.

Buddha said, “A man who starts to live for his soul is like a man who brings a lantern into a dark house. The darkness disappears at once. You have to be persistent in this, and your soul will have this light.”

Christ expressed all His teachings in His last commandment: “Love each other, as I loved you. Everyone will see that you are my disciples, if you love each other.” He did not say, “If you believe,” but “If you love.” Faith can change with time, because our knowledge is constantly changing. Love, on the contrary, never changes; love is eternal.

My religion is love to all living beings.

*In order to fulfill Christianity, we have to destroy its perversions and restore its purity.*

## January 9

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Knowledge is real knowledge only when it is acquired by the efforts of your intellect, not by memory.

Only when we forget what we were taught do we start to have real knowledge.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

A constant flow of thoughts expressed by other people can stop and deaden your own thought and your own initiative. . . . That is why constant learning softens your brain. . . . Stopping the creation of your own thoughts to give room for the thoughts from other books reminds me of Shakespeare's remark about his contemporaries who sold their land in order to see other countries.

—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

A thought can advance your life in the right direction only when it answers questions which were asked by your soul. A thought which was first borrowed from someone else and then accepted by your mind and memory does not really much influence your life, and sometimes leads you in the wrong direction.

*Read less, study less, but think more. Learn, both from your teachers and from the books which you read, only those things which you really need and which you really want to know.*

## January 10

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The basis of all education is the establishment of our relationship to the beginning of all things, and the conclusions about our behavior which may be drawn from this.

But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

—MATTHEW 18:6–7

As we bring up our children, we have to remember that we are caretakers of the future. By improving their education, we improve the future of mankind, the future of this world.

—After IMMANUEL KANT

*I think that the major obligation of parents and educators is to give children an understanding of the divine beginning that exists within them.*

—WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

Religious upbringing is the basis of all education.

## January 11

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Perfection is impossible without humility. “Why should I strive for perfection, if I am already good enough?”

The higher the position you occupy among other people, the more humble you should be. Many people live in height and glory, but the mysteries of this world can be revealed only to those who are humble. Do not seek out complication. Treat your duty with respect. Do not study what you should not. More things have already been revealed to you than you can understand.

—From APOCRYPHA

The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as ransom for many.

—MATTHEW 20:28

Some of your friends praise you, and others blame and criticize you; be closer to those who blame you and further from those who praise you.

—The TALMUD

When an arrow does not hit its target, the marksman blames himself, not another person. A wise man behaves in the same way.

—CONFUCIUS

*Remember all the bad things which you have done, and try to avoid doing bad things again. Remembering only your good deeds will interfere with your doing good in the future.*

## January 12

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There are people who take responsibility for making decisions for others and determining their relationship to God and to the world; and there are people, the overwhelming majority of them, who give this authority to the others, and blindly believe in everything they are told. Both groups of people commit an equal crime.

We are all like children who first repeat the unquestionable “truth” told to us by our grandmothers, then the “truth” told to us by our teachers, and then, when we become older, the “truth” told to us by prominent people.

—After RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

—MATTHEW 7:15–20

A man should use that spiritual heritage which he has received from the wise and holy people of the past, but he should test everything with his intellect, accepting certain things and rejecting others.

*Every person should define for himself his attitude to this world and to God.*

## January 13

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Faith is the understanding of the meaning of life and the acceptance of those duties and responsibilities connected to it.

*Who is a good man? Only a man who has faith is good. What is faith? This is when your will is in consent with the world's conscience and the world's wisdom.*

—CHINESE PROVERB

We should do only one thing: give ourselves into the hands of God, whatever our ultimate fate. Allow that which should happen to happen. What will happen will be good.

—HENRY AMIEL

They say that Judgment Day will come and that God will be furious. But a good God cannot bring anything but good. Do not be afraid: the end will be full of joy.

—PERSIAN WISDOM

You should not worry too much about what will happen after death. Deliver yourself to the divine creature and bless it: you know that it is love, therefore, why should you be afraid?

When Christ died, he said, "Father! I deliver my spirit into Thy hands." Those who say these words, not with their tongue but with all their heart, do not need anything else. If my spirit returns back to its Father, this is the best place for it, and nothing can be better.

Don't think that you can find peace for your soul without faith.



## January 14

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You should love only one thing in yourself, that which is the same in all of us. In loving that which is the same in all of us, you love God.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said until him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

—MATTHEW 22:36–40

*People live by love: love of yourself is the beginning of death; love of other people and of God is the beginning of life.*

God is love. And he who lives in love, lives in God, and God lives in him. If we love one another, God lives in us.

—I JOHN, from Chapter 4

Love is not a source, it is a consequence of our understanding the divine, spiritual beginning which exists in all of us.

# January 15

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The greatest truth of the teachings of Christ is the direct connection between a man (God's son) and God (His Father).

You ask me, what the most important feature of Christ's character was. I will answer you: it was his confidence in the greatness of the human soul. He saw in a person the reflection of God's image, and, therefore, he loved everyone, whoever a person was, without regard to his life or character.

—After WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

Both people and nations must get rid of prejudices. Feel yourself talking directly to God: don't read the book, read your soul; then a small chapel will become as big as the heavenly dome itself.

—After RALPH WALDO EMERSON

There are two ways of understanding God: either intellectually or spiritually, based on faith and morality. The intellectual understanding of God is not resolute enough and can be subjected to dangerous mistakes; spiritual understanding of God requires moral actions. This faith is both natural and supernatural.

—After IMMANUEL KANT

*Beware of everything which puts an obstacle between you and God.*

## January 16

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*False faith is the major cause of most of our misfortunes.*

The purpose of a human life is to bring the irrational beginning of our life to a rational beginning. In order to succeed in this, two things are important: (1) to see all irrational, unwise things in life and direct your attention to them and study them; (2) to understand the possibility of a rational, wise life. The major purpose of all teachers of mankind was the understanding of the irrational and rational beginnings in our life.

We should be ready to change our views at any time, and slough off prejudices, and live with an open and receptive mind. A sailor who sets the same sails all the time, without making changes when the wind changes, will never reach his harbor.

—HENRY GEORGE

Accept the teaching of Christ as it is, clear and simple; then you will see that we live among big lies.

## January 17

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Live for your soul, and without trying or even understanding that you're doing it, you will contribute to the improvement of society.

Why do you torture yourself? You want kindness, but you do not know where to find it. Know that you cannot achieve anything without God. . . . God is your only Lord, your only master, and you do not need another. God will make you free.

—F. ROBERT DE LAMENNAIS

It would be nice if wisdom had such a quality that it could flow from one man who is full of wisdom to another man who has no wisdom, just as with two connected vessels water flows from one vessel to the other until the water level is the same in both of them. The problem is that to obtain wisdom, you must make an independent, serious effort of your own.

*If you can teach a person kindness and love, but you do not, you lose a brother.*

—CHINESE PROVERB

Improve your own soul, and be confident that only in so doing can you contribute to the improvement of the larger society of which you are part.

## January 18

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A scholar knows many books; a well-educated person has knowledge and skills; an enlightened person understands the meaning and purpose of his life.

There are a limitless number of different sciences, but without one basic science, that is, what is the meaning of life and what is good for the people, all other forms of knowledge and art become idle and harmful entertainment.

We live a senseless life, contrary to the understanding of life by the wisest people of all times. This happens because our young generations are educated in the wrong way—they are taught different sciences but they are not taught the meaning of life.

*The only real science is the knowledge of how a person should live his life. And this knowledge is open to everyone.*

## January 19

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Society can be improved only by self-sacrifice.

Heaven and earth are eternal. They are eternal because they do not exist for themselves. In the same way, a truly holy person does not live for himself, and therefore he can become eternal, and can achieve anything.

—LAO-TZU

*There is only one law, both in your personal and social life: if you want to improve your soul, you should be ready to sacrifice it.*

The improvement of man can be measured by the level of his inner freedom. The more a person becomes free from his personality, the more freedom he has.

## January 20

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Death and birth are two limits, and something similar is hidden behind each.

When you think about what will happen to your soul after death, think also about what happened to your soul before your birth. If you plan to go somewhere, then you came from somewhere.

Where do we go after death? We go to where we came from. There is nothing which can be called ourselves in that land; therefore, we do not remember what has happened to us there.

When a person leads a good life, he is happy at the present moment and he does not think what will happen after this life. If he thinks of death, he looks at how well this life is laid out, and he believes that after death everything will be as good as it is now. It is much better to believe that everything which God makes for us is good than to believe in all the pleasures of paradise.

*When we die, our souls become free.*

—After HERACLITUS

A person should not think too much about what will happen after his life. Follow the will of those who sent us into this world; that will is in our minds and our hearts.

# January 21

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The more closely a person follows his intellect and controls his passions, the closer he comes to spiritual life, to love of God and of his neighbor.

We would think a man insane who, instead of covering his house with a roof and putting windows in his window frames, goes out in stormy weather, and scolds the wind, the rain, and the clouds. But we all do the same when we scold and blame the evil in other people instead of fighting the evil which exists in us. It is possible to get rid of the evil inside of us, as it is possible to make a roof and windows for our house. This is possible. But it is not possible for us to destroy evil in this world, just as we cannot order the weather to change and the clouds to disappear. If, instead of teaching others, we would educate and improve ourselves, then there would be less evil in this world, and all people would live better lives.

Do not be embarrassed by your mistakes. Nothing can teach us better than our understanding of them. This is one of the best ways of self-education.

—THOMAS CARLYLE

*It seems to us that the most important work in the world is the work which is visible, which we can see: building a house, plowing the land, feeding cattle, gathering fruits; and that the work which is invisible, the work done by our soul, is not important. But our invisible work at the improvement of our soul is the most important work in the world, and all other visible kinds of work are useful only when we do this major work.*



## January 24

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Nobody knows where the human race is going. The highest wisdom, then, is to know where *you* should go: toward perfection.

A wise man seeks wisdom; a madman thinks that he has found it.

—PERSIAN PROVERB

*It is not the place we occupy which is important, but the direction in which we move.*

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Your actions should be determined not by the desire of the people around you, but by the needs of all mankind.

## January 25

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There is a basic knowledge which is necessary for every human being; until a person has acquired this basic knowledge, all other kinds of knowledge will be harmful for him.

Socrates told his students that in good systems of education, there is a certain limit you should not go beyond. In geometry, he said, it is enough to know how to measure the land when you want to sell it or buy it, or how to share an inheritance, or to divide work among workers. He did not like too many sophisticated sciences; though he knew all of them. He said that sophisticated knowledge requires an extra effort that takes the student's time from the most basic and the most important human pursuit: moral perfection.

—XENOPHON

Divert your gaze from the world of lies. Do not trust your feelings. Only in yourself, only in your impersonal self, can you find the eternal.

—DHAMMAPADA, a book of BUDDHIST WISDOM

*It is better to know several basic rules of life than to study many unnecessary sciences. The major rules of life will stop you from evil and show you the good path in life; but the knowledge of many unnecessary sciences may lead you into the temptation of pride, and stop you from understanding the basic rules of life.*

## January 26

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A rich man cannot be merciful. If he becomes really merciful, he will quickly lose his riches.

Stop robbing others before you give money to beggars. With the same hand that we rob one person, we reward another, giving to the poor the money which we have taken from the even poorer. Better no charity than this kind of charity.

—SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The best example of the cruelty of the rich man's life is his effort to become virtuous.

*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

*My little children, let us not love in word; neither in tongue; but in deed and truth.*

—I JOHN 3:17–18

In order to love not with word and tongue, but in deed and truth, everyone should help those who ask for help, so Christ said.

But if you start giving to all those who ask, even if you are very rich, very soon you will not be rich anymore.

## January 27

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Love for other people gives a real feeling of good, and it unites you with other people and with God.

*A wise man loves not because he wants to profit from it but because he finds bliss in love itself.*

Do not regret the past. What is the use of regrets? The lie says that you should regret. The truth says you should be filled with love. Push all sad memories away from you. Do not speak of the past. Live in the light of love, and all things will be given to you.

—PERSIAN WISDOM

They asked a Chinese man, “What is science?” He said, “Science is knowing people.” Then they asked, “And what is virtue?” He answered, “Virtue is loving people.”

Just as a mother puts her life at risk to guard and save her only child, so every person should guard and save in himself love for every living being.

The fearlessness, calm, inner peace, and joy which are given to us by love are so big that all other things in the world cannot be compared with them, especially for the person who understands the real blessing of love.

## January 28

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For a person to know the law that makes him free, he must be elevated from a material to a spiritual life.

I have many things to say and to judge on you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

—JOHN 8:26–28

“I and God are the same,” said the teacher. If you think that my spiritual being is God, you are mistaken. But my real self is close to God, and to other people. In order to understand this part of myself, you should elevate the man inside of you. When you elevate the man inside of you, then you will see that there is no difference between him and any other person on earth.

It only seems as if we differ from each other. A flower on a blossoming tree can think that it is a separate being, but all flowers are parts of the same blossoming of one apple tree, and they all come from one seed.

*We live a short period of time in this world, but we live it according to the laws of eternal life.*

—After HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Submission to the law created by men makes one a slave; obedience to the law created by God makes one free.

## January 31

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Only greatly insolent people establish a religious law which is to be taken for granted by others, which should be accepted by everyone on faith, without any discussion or doubts.

Why must people do this?

What a strange thing! Many scoundrels try to disguise their dirty deeds by their dedication to the interests of religion, or by their high morals, or by love for their motherland.

—HEINRICH HEINE

But be not yet called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

—MATTHEW 23:8–10

*The essence of the teaching of Christ is to follow his commandments. Those who just repeat, "My God, My Lord" will not get to heaven; only those who fulfill God's will.*

# February 1

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It is not possible to explain the origin of the spiritual from the material.

*A man consists of body and soul. Thus often, especially in his youth, he is interested only in his body, but nevertheless, the most essential part of every man is not his body, but his soul. It is your soul that you must take care of, not your body. You must learn this over time, and remember that your real life is in your spirit, that is, in your soul. Save it from everyday dirt and do not let your flesh guide it; subdue your body to your soul, and then you will fulfill your destiny and live a happy life.*

—After MARCUS AURELIUS

The heart of the matter is whether we believe or disbelieve in the existence of a spiritual realm. All people are divided into two groups, those who are alive and those who are dead; in other words, those who believe and those who don't.

An unbeliever says: "What is spirit! . . . What I ate and what I enjoyed, this is what I possess, this is material and real!" And such a person, without thinking much, takes care only of the outer things, arranging in order only his own mean, dirty affairs; he becomes a liar, a snob, a slave, and does not feel any higher needs: freedom, truth, and love. Such a person keeps away from the light of the intellect, because in fact he is dead, and this light gives life only to living things, and hardens and rots the dead things.

—ALEXANDR ARKHANGELSKY

The difference between the spiritual realm and the material is equally clear and obvious, both for a child and a wise man; further speculations are not necessary.

## February 2

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*There are two different states of human existence: first, to live without thinking of death; second, to live with the thought that you approach death with every hour of your life.*

The more you transform your life from the material to the spiritual domain, the less you become afraid of death. A person who lives a truly spiritual life has no fear of death.

When you have doubts about what to do, just imagine that you might die at the end of that same day, and then all your doubts will disappear, and you will see clearly what your conscience tells you, and what is your true personal wish.

A man condemned to immediate execution will not think about the growth of his estate, or about achieving glory, or about the victory of one group over another, or about the discovery of a new planet. But one minute before his death a man may wish to console an abused person, or help an old person to stand up, or to put a bandage on someone's injury, or to repair a toy for a child.



## February 3

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Kindness is for your soul as health is for your body: you do not notice it when you have it.

*A person becomes happy to the same extent to which he or she gives happiness to other people.*

—JEREMY BENTHAM

The will of God for us is to live in happiness and to take an interest in the lives of others.

—JOHN RUSKIN

Love is real only when a person can sacrifice himself for another person. Only when a person forgets himself for the sake of another, and lives for another creature, only this kind of love can be called true love, and only in this love do we see the blessing and reward of life. This is the foundation of the world.

Nothing can make our life, or the lives of other people, more beautiful than perpetual kindness.

## February 4

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A man is free only when he lives in truth, and the truth may be perceived only by the intellect.

If you throw some nuts and cookies on a road, you will eventually see children come, pick them up, and start to argue and fight for them. Adults would not fight for such things. And even children would not pick up the nuts' empty shells.

For a wise man, the wealth, the glory, and the rewards of this world are like sweets or empty shells on a road. Let the children pick them up and fight for them. Let them kiss the hands of the rich men, the rulers, and their servants. For the wise one, all these are but empty shells.

—EPICETUS

*A distinctive feature of a thinking person is submission to his fate, as opposed to the shameful struggle with it that is a characteristic feature of animals.*

—MARCUS AURELIUS

We are not free in this world, subdued by our passions and by the emotions of other people to the degree that we forget the requirements of our intellects. If we really want to become free, we can be so only through our intellect.

## February 7

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Perfecting the self is both an inner and an outer work: You cannot improve yourself without communicating with other people, influencing them, and being influenced by them.

Three temptations torture people: sexual desire, pride, and lust for wealth. All the misfortunes of mankind come from these three cravings. Without them, people would live in happiness. But how can we get rid of these terrible illnesses? . . . Work on yourself and improve yourself; this is the answer. Start the improvement of this world from within.

—F. ROBERT DE LAMENNAIS

*“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father,” Christ said. This does not mean that Christ asked people to be as good as God; only that everyone should strive for perfection.*

Pure perfection can be found only in God; one’s life consists of becoming closer to God. And when a person knows that good is good and that evil is evil, then he or she gets closer to good, and moves farther from evil.

—CONFUCIUS

There is nothing more harmful to you than improving only your material, animal side of life. There is nothing more beneficial, both for you and for others, than activity directed to the improvement of your soul.

## February 8

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Why do people like to blame others so much? He who casts blame on another person is quick to think that he would not do the very same thing. It is the same with people who like to listen to the fault-finding of their neighbors.

When two people have a dispute, both are to blame. And therefore, a dispute will stop only when at least one person understands that he or she is guilty.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

—MATTHEW 7:1–2

Stop blaming other people, and you will feel what an alcoholic feels when he stops drinking, or what a smoker feels when he stops smoking. You will feel that you have brought relief to your soul.

## February 9

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The material evil caused by war is big, but it is incomparably small in comparison with the perversion or the understanding of good and bad which happens during the war, and which is put into the souls of people who do not think.

*A child meets another child with a smile, displaying his friendly attitude and joy. This same behavior lives in all sincere people. But very often, a man from one nation already hates a man from another nation, and is ready to cause him sufferings and even death, even before he meets him. Those who create these feelings in nations commit a terrible crime!*

The most powerful weapon known is the weapon of blessing. Therefore, a clever person relies on it. He wins with peace, not with war.

—LAO-TZU

War creates a state in which power and glory is at the end too often received by the most undeserving and vicious people.

## February 10

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The higher the opinion a person has of himself, the more unstable is his position; the lower he moves in his self-esteem, the firmer he stands.

To be strong, you have to be like water: if there are no obstacles, it flows; if there is an obstacle it stops; if a dam is broken, then it flows further; if a vessel is square, then it has a square form; if a vessel is round, then it has a round form. Because it is so soft and flexible, it is the most necessary and the strongest thing.

—LAO-TZU

The more a person analyzes his inner self, the more insignificant he seems to himself. This is the first lesson of wisdom. Let us be humble, and we will become wise. Let us know our weakness, and it will give us power.

—WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

Water does not stay on a mountaintop, but flows into the valley. In the same manner, real virtue does not remain with those people who want to be higher than the others; but virtue stays only with people who are humble.

—After the TALMUD

*Try to find out your potential. After you know it, do not be afraid to underestimate it. Be cautious not to exaggerate it.*

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